

The media are vigorous and fairly diverse. However, outlets often display a strong political bias, and their reporting is influenced by the economic or political interests of their owners.

Legal Environment

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press. Defamation remains a criminal offense, though legal reforms enacted in 2012 eliminated prison terms as a punishment, leaving only fines. Civil defamation suits remain common. A 2012 amendment to the civil code set limits on financial penalties for defamation in order to protect the survival of media outlets.

A 1999 freedom of information law was poorly implemented, and the prevailing belief is that information is difficult to access. A new freedom of information law enacted in September 2014 aimed to reduce delays in responding to requests and imposes fines for officials who refuse valid applications. A Commission for the Right to Information will monitor compliance, and government institutions are required to appoint coordinators to handle requests.

The country's broadcast media regulator, the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), is seen as highly politicized. In October and November 2014, the parliament ended long-standing vacancies at the seven-member body, electing two members and a new chairman. The opposition Democratic Party (PD) boycotted the votes as part of its wider boycott of parliamentary activity since July, and claimed that the appointments were consequently illegal.

Political Environment

Private media outlets typically take an editorial line that suits the interests of their owners, who are often involved in politics or other industries. Self-censorship thus remains a major concern. Partisan bias is especially visible during election periods. Although the media play an important role in exposing political malfeasance, few outlets engage in investigative reporting, and the implicated officials are rarely punished by the courts. Blogs and other online media offer a more independent alternative to mainstream outlets.

Journalists are sometimes physically obstructed from covering specific events, assaulted, or threatened during or because of their work. In June 2014, during a major police raid on a village known for drug trafficking, criminal suspects shot at a television crew from A1 Report; their vehicle was torched and one journalist was briefly held hostage. Several journalists also faced violent attacks and threats by unknown assailants.

Economic Environment

The public broadcaster, RTSH, is financially dependent on the state and typically shows a strong progovernment bias. Two private television stations have national reach, and dozens of smaller television and radio outlets also operate in a poorly regulated environment. There is a variety of daily and weekly newspapers, but circulation is the lowest in Europe, and distribution networks do not reach some rural

districts. Albanians have access to satellite television, foreign radio content, and television broadcasts from neighboring Greece and Italy. There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 60 percent of the population in 2014, but access in rural areas remains limited.

Media ownership is reportedly obscured by the use of proxies, which circumvents legal barriers to concentration. There is little foreign investment in the Albanian media market. Most outlets rely on financial support from owners and a few major advertisers. The economic crisis in Albania since 2011 has affected many funding sources, and outlets often delay salaries. Some journalists supplement low salaries with other sources of income that can lead to conflicts of interest in their reporting.

The PD, as the ruling party until 2013, allegedly directed extensive state advertising purchases to politically friendly outlets, and it continued to do so in 2014 through its control of the Tirana city government. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) found that the Tirana government accounted for 65.4 percent of all print ad spending by state institutions in the first three-quarters of 2014.